

Annual Report 2023

The Finnish Institute in the Middle East (FIME) is a research institute that focuses on studying Middle Eastern cultures, religions, societies, and classical and modern languages. The institute supports Finnish research on the Middle East and offers teaching in cooperation with universities. The institute also brings research-based perspectives to public discourse on the Middle East. The Finnish Institute in the Middle East operates in the whole region with an office in Beirut, Lebanon, and a representative in Cairo, Egypt. FIME is hosted by the Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, based in Helsinki.

Message from the Chairperson

Last year was full of changes for the institute and the foundation. In addition to the everyday alterations related to the passage of time, the growing uncertainty caused by the tragic conflict in the Israel/Palestine region was a challenge we adapted to.

A significant change was the change of director of the institute when Irina Piippo completed her term in the spring. I want to highlight Irina's MIGDIA project: the generous funding received is proof of the high quality of academic work done within the institute's framework—FIME is an academic institute par excellence!

In this regard, the future also looks promising. Susanne Dahlgren, who started as director in the summer, is an internationally known anthropologist and researcher of the Middle East. She has brought new features to the institute's activities. I thank Susanne and everyone else involved in the institute's activities last year in different roles in Beirut and Kairo: Samuli Lähteenaho, Manal Chatila, Said Sadek, Mariam Al-Hasbani, Nuura Naboulsi, Sofia Nyberg, and Sara Kosonen. You have done an excellent job!

The contribution of the foundation's Helsinki employees is also essential. My warm thanks to Anu Leinonen, Juuli Ahola and Antti Tarvainen. Antti experienced first-hand the effects of the war in Gaza when the Tarvainen family fled the Middle East to Cyprus. The Board of Trustees has been active and creative. It has been an absolute privilege to work with such a remarkable company.

Last year also brought sad news: the Foundation's former Chairman, Professor Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, passed away unexpectedly just before Christmas. It is my time to leave FIME because my maximum of 12 years as a member of the board of trustees is ending. Thank you for all these years, which I also combined with my time as the director of the Institute at Bab Sharqi in Damascus. I will enjoy following the activities from the audience in the future.

In Helsinki on 3 March 2024

Hannu Juusola

Chairperson of the Board, Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

<" The generous funding received is proof of the high quality of academic work done within the framework of the institute – FIME is an academic institute par excellence!">

Review by the Director

I started my term as the director of the Institute in June. In August, we launched a lecture series called *Badaro Talks*. We have developed activities cooperating with other academic institutes and local universities in Lebanon. In September, we organized, together with the German Orient-Institute Beirut, the launch of a book about the 2019 Lebanese uprising, edited by our previous Resident Scholar, Rima Majid, and Jeffrey G. Karam.

The ongoing war in Gaza and unrest in the Middle East have had a significant impact on our activities. Despite being secure in Beirut, several countries have imposed travel restrictions, making it difficult for us to conduct our operations smoothly. We are closely monitoring the situation and taking necessary measures to mitigate the impact of these developments on our activities. Thus, in the fall, we focused on publishing an analysis and comments on the situation in the Middle East. The teachers' course was held in Jordan in October with the union of Finnish religious teachers.

For the first time, the Institute was prominently featured at the annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association, held in Montreal in November. The December student course in Cairo was excellent, but unfortunately, the storm in Central Europe prevented half of the participants from joining the group.

In the 2023–2025 strategy period, FIME will invest in Nordic cooperation. Our student courses will be open for applications through NSMES, the Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies. The Institute has translated its homepages into Swedish and continues cooperating with organizations supporting Finnish-Swedish research. In Finland, FIME has closely cooperated with Mikko Joronen's ERC project at the University of Tampere and with the ANEE (Ancient Near Eastern Empires) Center of Excellence at the University of Helsinki.

In Beirut on 4 March 2024

Susanne Dahlgren

Director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Research

We facilitate research activities in the Middle East

The State, Legal System, and Political Conflicts

Susanne Dahlgren, who has headed the institute since June, published an article in the edited book *Yemen at a Crossroads: What is Left of Arabia Felix?*, published by the Austrian Defense Academy. She continued writing her two monographs and editing several articles. Dahlgren was the keynote speaker at the Yemen conference organized in Washington, DC. She convened her panel at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual conference in Montreal. At the same conference, she participated in the round table discussion of the Association of Middle East Anthropology (AMEA), a subsidiary of MESA. Dahlgren is a member of the board of AMEA.

Politics of Shoreline in Beirut

FIME's researcher Samuli Lähteenaho submitted his PhD dissertation for review at the University of Helsinki. The dissertation examines the coastline of Beirut and Lebanon ethnographically from the perspectives of the environment and urban space politics. In addition, he worked on the co-authored monograph *An Anthropology of Crosslocations* (Helsinki University Press, to be published in 2024) and edited with Prof. Brenda Chalfin (U. Florida), the upcoming special issue of *Environmental Humanities* journal, *Sand as Matter and Method*. Lähteenaho's articles were published in *Kleio*, *Suomen Antropologi*, and *the International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and he presented his research at the Mediterranean Network of the European Society of Social Anthropologists (EASA) workshop.

FIME Resident Scholar Program

The program aims to enhance the Institute's academic ties with Lebanon and support the Lebanese academic community, particularly in light of the difficult economic circumstances. In 2023, Dr. Mariam Al-Hasbani served as the resident Scholar and researched brain drain among highly educated individuals in Lebanon. In September, FIME and Orient-Institut Beirut held the launch event for the book *The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution*, edited by FIME's Resident Scholar of 2021, Rima Majid and Jeffrey G. Karam.

Academic Collaboration

We strive for international and free science in Finland and the Middle East

Round table discussion: Everyday peace in conflict-affected societies in Lebanon, Syria, and Georgia: Insights for research and practice

11 May in Beirut

Twenty experts gathered to discuss the theories and practices of everyday peace and consider the role of "ordinary people" from different communities and their views on the topic. The discussion was a continuation of a workshop organized by the institute's visiting researcher, Dima Smaira, last year.

Badaro Talks

FIME launched a new guest lecture series in Beirut to raise its academic profile and expand its networks in Lebanon. Two visiting lectures were held in the series:

- Ethnographic fieldwork in a refugee camp – studying Palestinian refugees' lifeworld in Southern Lebanon, Dr Tiina Järvi, Tampere University, 24 August
- What Do Psychologists in Finland Discuss About?", Lic. Psych Nina Lyytinen, 23 October

Nordic Nubia Expedition Collections

Finland, June-November 2023

The archeological collections of the Nordic Nubian Expedition (1961–1964) in Finland were moved from a shabby barn in Orimattila to the Vantaa Collection and Conservation Center of the Finnish Heritage Agency. The artifacts were cleaned, photographed, and cataloged for further study and will soon be available to researchers for the first time in decades.

Open-Access Publishing

FIME continued the open-access publishing cooperation with the *Studia Orientalia Electronica* journal of the Finnish Oriental Society.

Education

We are raising a new generation of Middle East researchers

Introduction to Ottoman History

Remote, 13.3.–4.5. Teacher Dr. Noémi Lévy-Aksu

Holy places, Bedouin culture, and interpretations of Islam in Jordan

Jordan, 18.–25.10. Teacher Dr. Päivi Miettunen, for teachers of religious education

Deep-dive into Cairo: Old and new Cairo through the eyes of history, urban studies and decolonial social science

Egypt, 1.–9.12. Coordinator Dr. Said Sadek

A misunderstood religion? An online course on the basics of Islam, www.islamkurssi.fi

FIME offers a massive open online course (MOOC) on the basic concepts of Islam free of charge in Finnish. An introductory course on the modern Middle East will be published in April 2024.

Public Discussion

We provide research-based information on the Middle East that is increasingly needed in Finnish society

FIME's experts actively comment on events in the Middle East for the Finnish media. FIME and its employees appeared in various media a record 290 times during the year. The topics ranged from the war in Gaza or Turkey hindering Finland's NATO membership to the evaluation of the Houthi attacks, to the rescuing of the Nubia expedition archeological collection, and the Koran burnings in Sweden.

Lähi-itä NYT (Middle East NOW) Blog and podcast (www.lahi-itanyt.fi)

The multi-voiced platform straddles fast-paced news broadcasting and analytical academic research, offering broad, critical perspectives on the Middle East and the region's events.

In collaboration with its partners, FIME organized several public events:

- Räjähdysherkkä yleistajuistaminen – at the Helsinki Night of Science, 12 January
- Ukrainan sodan varjo Lähi-idässä, Helsinki & hybrid, 7 February
- Solidarity event for the victims of the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, Helsinki & hybrid, 27 February
- Turkin tasavalta – ensimmäiset 100 vuotta, Helsinki, 24 October
- Reception at the MESAn conference, Montreal, 4 November

FIME also organized two networking events in Beirut and one in Helsinki and hosted the Mirsal and Young Lebanese for Development & Peace (YLDP) groups as a part of their ERASMUS+ project.

The FIME and MIGDIA experts were invited to speak at ten events organized by others, which almost 600 people attended. The most noteworthy event in Finland was Susanne Dahlgren's presentation at the journalist seminar by the Advisory Board for Defense Information, ABDI seminar, on December 12.

Culture

We work towards promoting Finnish culture in Lebanon and making it more familiar to its citizens

Soprano Annika Leino and composer, pianist Jukka Nykänen in Beirut

The highlight of Finland's year in Lebanon was a concert in which Annika Leino and Jukka Nykänen charmed an audience of 350 people. The Honorary Consul General of Finland, Zafer Chaoui, and the Finnish Embassy in Beirut organized the concert and cocktail party, which was [visible in Lebanese media](#).

Finland in Lebanon

The institute was prominently featured in Carmen Labak's documentary film on Finnish-Lebanon relations, which was filmed and broadcast on the LBC channel on December 19. The documentary has been broadcast several times.

Partners and Networks

We collaborated with 38 partners

Our partners included: the University of Helsinki and its different centers and departments, especially ANEE Centre of Excellence, Tampere University, Oulu University, Dar al-Kalima University, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Finnish Heritage Agency, Association of Middle East Anthropology MESA, Association for Middle East Women's Studies, Finnish Egyptological Society, Orient-Institut Beirut, Institut français du Proche-Orient, the other Finnish institutes abroad, especially the institutes in Rome and in Athens, Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, Kurdish Studies Center, Finnish National Agency of Education, Suomen uskonnonopettajien liitto, Konstantinus Suuren ritarikunta/Konstantinus Association, Lähi-idän opiskelijat, Finnish-Arabic Society, National Defence University, Karavaani, Suomi-Syyria ystävyysseura, Eappi FINLAND -program, Committee of 100 in Finland, Finland's embassies of Beirut, Cairo and Ankara and the representative office of Finland in Ramallah, Honorary Consul General of Finland in Lebanon Mr. Zafer Chaoui, Anna

Lindh Foundation, Finnish Psychologists for Social Responsibility, Mirsal, Young Lebanese for Development & Peace, Beit Atfal Assamoud.

Of particular importance were the Honorary Consul General of Finland, Zafer Chaoui, The Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes ry (SKTI, www.instituutit.fi), and the Friends of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East Association (SLIY, www.sliy.fi).

Institute personnel

- Docent Irina Piippo, Director of the Institute until 5/2023, Docent Susanne Dahlgren 6/2023 onwards, Beirut
- Researcher, M.Soc.Sc Samuli Lähteenaho, Beirut
- Resident Scholar, Dr. Mariam Al-Hasbani, Beirut (3 months)
- Administrative assistant, Manal Chatila, Beirut (part-time)
- Senior representative, Dr. Said Sadek, Cairo (part-time)

Interns:

- M.Soc.Sc Nuura Naboulsi (EDUFI)
- MTh Sofia Nyberg (EDUFI)
- BA Sara Kosonen (Erasmus)

"The internship at FIME allowed for a diverse experience and we learned a lot about the Middle East in context, and our perspectives on the region expanded even further."

– Sofia Nyberg and Sara Kosonen, Institute Interns, fall 2023

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

The Foundation maintains the Institute

Grants

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East awarded three research grants totaling 8400 euros for research in the Middle East region and travel-related costs. It also funded seven students to pursue Arabic language studies with 10,242 Euros.

Start-up Israel/Palestine: the political worlds of innovation economy

Researcher of the Foundation Antti Tarvainen wrote his dissertation in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, in two different periods (spring and autumn). The fall 2023 events in Gaza and the West Bank led to an evacuation from the area. Tarvainen actively commented on the situation in Gaza for the Finnish media for the rest of the year. In addition, Tarvainen gave a presentation on his dissertation at the conference of the European International Relations Society (EISA) and published his first postdoc research article (with Benoit Challand, New School for Social Research as the second author) in the journal *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.

Discussion: Israelin mielenosoitukset, Palestiinan miehitys ja kahden valtion ratkaisu: Mitä Israelissa ja Palestiinassa tapahtuu?

29.5. Tiedekulma, Helsinki

Puhutaan Gazasta! Tutkijoiden näkökulmia Palestiinan ja Israelin tilanteeseen, webinar, 22 November

Administration

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East is registered in Finland and has an office in Helsinki. The highest decision-making power of the Foundation lies with its Board of Trustees, which appoints the director of the Institute. In 2023, the board met four times and consisted of the following experts:

Prof. Hannu Juusola (chair)

Deputy member: Prof. Jutta Jokiranta (until 20.3.), Doc. Ilkka Lindstedt (20.3. onwards)

Doc. Sakari Karjalainen (vice chair until 20.3.), Prof. Jutta Jokiranta (vice chair 20.3. onwards)

Deputy member: Tom Kankkonen, journalist

Prof. Saana Svärd

Deputy member: Dr. Olli Ruohomäki (until 20.3.), Dr. Timo R. Stewart (20.3. onwards)

Tero Norjanen, Director of International Cooperation

Deputy member: Rolf Steffansson, Executive Director (until 18.9.), Pauliina Parhiala, Executive Director (18.9. onwards)

Doc. Pekka Lindqvist

Deputy member: Doc. Ruth Illman, Research Director

Doc. Jyri Komulainen

Deputy member: Doc. Elina Hellqvist

Ambassador Risto Veltheim

Deputy member: Kari Norkonmaa, M.Soc.Sc.

Prof. Serafim Seppälä (until 20.3.), Doc. Olli Ruohomäki (20.3. onwards)

Deputy member: Dr. Heta Hurskainen, Vicar

Ambassador Maria Serenius

Deputy member: Patrick Lindgren, LL.M (until 20.3.) Dr. Tiina Järvi (20.3. onwards)

Dr. Anasse Bouhlal (20.3. onwards)

Doc. Marko Juntunen (18.9. onwards)

Foundation personnel in Finland

- Dr. Anu Leinonen, Executive Officer of the Foundation, Helsinki
- Juuli Ahola (MA), Administrative and Communications Assistant, Helsinki
- Antti Tarvainen (M.Soc.Sc.), researcher, Helsinki/Ramallah

Funding

The Foundation's total expenditure in 2023 was 521,415 euros. The Foundation's income consisted of grants from the Ministry of Education and Culture (88 %), other grants, revenue, and donations (12 %).

MIGDIA

We research everyday plurilingualism and education

International Migration and Diasporic Plurilingualism in Educational Paths

Irina Piippo's (director until 31.5.) MIGDIA research project deals with emigration, cross-border educational paths, and diasporic multilingualism. FIME hosts this research project, funded by the Kone Foundation, until 2027. Piippo's research in the project focuses on teaching primary school-aged children Arabic as their mother tongue in Finland. The institute's former researchers, Taavi Sundell and Sandra Nasser El-Dine, started as MIGDIA researchers on 1 January 2023.

Researchers in MIGDIAn

- Doc. Irina Piippo (from 1.6. onwards), director of the research project
- Dr. Taavi Sundell
- M.Soc.Sc Sandra Nasser El-Dine
- MA Mikko Lehikoinen, Funding from the University of Helsinki
- Doc. Maria Ahlholm, University Lecturer at the University of Helsinki

migdia.fi

Year's activities and achievement in numbers

- 10 peer-reviewed articles, 1 dissertation, 1 edited volume, and 2 book reviews in scholarly journals
7 academic presentations, 2 participations in academic round tables.
- 1 round table discussion and 2 guest lectures: 40 participants.
- 1 remote course: 1 instructor and 23 participants and 65 study credits.
1 intensive course in Cairo: 3 instructors, 10 guest lecturers, 4+6 participants (6 remotely), 20 study credits.
- Professional update education for religious education teachers in Jordan: 1 instructor and 18 participants.
- *Course on Islam (MOOC)*: 377 new registered users, 136 users completed the course.

FIME funded research and Arabic language studies in the Middle East for nine researchers and students for a total of 50 weeks and half a year research visit to the US

11 public events: c. 1,300 participants

29 blog posts in Lähi-itä NYT and Paikan päältä blog series, 55,000 visits

Lähi-itä NYT podcast, over 1,100 listeners

FB: 74 posts and 3,100 followers

Instagram: 58 posts and 253 stories, over 1200 followers

70 Lähi-itä NYT tweets for 1,100 followers

142 FIME tweets for 550 followers

6 newsletters for 900 subscribers

FIME or FIME experts in media: 292 appearances (per category as a pie-chart)

38 partners

Income as a pie-chart:

Ministry of Education and Culture grant: 88%

Other 12%

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Youtube: [FIME](https://www.youtube.com/FIME)

Lähi-itä NYT blog and podcast (FIN and ENG): www.lahi-itanyt.fi

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